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JAPAN'S EMPEROR SYSTEM AND ASIA

The concept of eschatology is a difficult one. I have come to gain a deeper understanding of the concept, however, through my involvement with "the least of these"—my sisters and brothers who are poor, deprived, oppressed in society. The majority of society claims to work for peace by following a destructive path characterized by elitism and aggression through the unjust exploitation of the world's resources. The Church must take a different path towards peace, traveling together with the least of these sisters and brothers.

On February 11, the so-called "National Foundation Day," I was involved in protest meetings in Hokkaido. On that occasion, our discussion focussed on Japan's Emperor System in relation to other Asian countries. Japan began its drive for modernization under the slogan "Escape from Asian-ness and Catch-up with Western countries." Using that as a rallying cry, Japan reinforced the Emperor system to use it as a powerful ideology for uniting Japanese for modernization in Japan and imperialism in Asia.

I would like to suggest that the Emperor system is a very flexible one that has been shaped to respond to the conditions and circumstances of different times. During the time Japan was under

a fascist military regime, the Emperor system was used to rigidly control people to fit fixed roles. No sacrifice was too great to make for the Emperor. In the post-World War II period, the Emperor has continued to play a vital symbolic role in state affairs.

I clearly remember when ONODA Hiroo, an ex-Japanese soldier was found to be still in the jungles of Mindoro, Philippines,

in 1975, 30 years after the war had ended.

It was at a time when Japan's economic imperialism in other Asian countries was being strongly criticized. Protest against then Prime Minister Tanaka had reached a high point within ASEAN countries. (During his visit to ASEAN countries, Tanaka received a warm welcome only in the Philippines, then under martial law.) Onoda appeared in the jungle, but declared that he would surrender unless he received work directly from the Emperor or telling him to do so.

(by Sadao Watanabe)

As there was no way this could happen, the Japanese government instead printed hundreds of handbills saying: "Japan lost the war. But today Japan has become an economic giant. Therefore, you do not have to be ashamed. Please come out." At that time, 10 years ago, Japan was openly proud of the economic power it had gained in Asia and the world.

Recently the Emperor's grandson returned to Japan after several years of study in England. At a press conference he was asked if he had made any marriage plans.



(cont'd from page 1)

In reply, he answered, "Well, the woman I marry won't be the type who shops at Tiffany's [Jewelry Store]!" I believe that his comment can be compared with Japan's present economic relations with other countries.

While 10 years ago Japan boasted of its wealth, today, however, following the tone of the Emperor's grandson's statement, there is a growing feeling in Japan that Japan's wealth should not be flaunted. In effect, the Emperor's grandson has said that those who are really rich should not openly boast about it. Japan is trying to change its image--when in fact its economic imperialism in Asia continues. The oppression of people in other Asian countries continues--sometimes through Japanese business, sometimes through Japanese foreign aid to unjust and repressive regimes. Minorities persecuted under the Emperor system continue to be oppressed.

The role of the Church, in Japan and elsewhere, is to put the least of these sisters and brothers first. Only then can we fill our role as an eschatological church, working to realize our vision of the Kingdom.

[Meditation/reflection on Matt.25:31-40 by Rev. MAEJIMA Munetoshi, given at weekly prayer meeting of the NCCJ February 20, 1986.]

NCCP POST-ELECTION STATEMENT

[In view of the present crisis in the Philippines, we share this statement received from the National Council of Churches in the Philippines.]

We express great concern over the conduct of the February 7, 1986 National Election. The heavy turnout of voters on election day gave credence to our belief that the people wanted to express their will and that they desired that this will be honored and respected. Recent events, however, have shown that there are elements in Philippine society which seek to frustrate the will of the people. It has become common knowledge here and abroad that the electoral process was marred by massive vote-buying

ballot-snatching, harassment and terrorism. We consider all these as acts of subversion against the sovereign will of the people and as insults to the honor and dignity of our nation...

We are fearful of the detrimental consequences of these acts to the well-being of our nation. For by these acts, the people are being pushed to the limits of their patience. These acts have created an explosive situation in our country which could usher in a bloody confrontation among the people.

For the sake of God, justice and our common weal, we appeal to the powers that be in our country to exercise their authority and power to bring this election process to a just, honest and credible conclusion at the earliest possible time. Any leadership which is established through means other than this, is empty and will not deserve the respect and confidence of the people. Greater than our partisanship must be our concern that the sovereign will of the people must be respected. In times like this, to be honorable, heroic and patriotic means to direct our loyalty to the people and not to party or to person.

We exhort the people to be vigilant in their pursuit of justice by acting justly, by expressing their freedom with a high sense of responsibility for the well-being of our nation and by being tempered even in their response to acts committed against them and their loved ones, which violate their rights and dignity. We appeal for sobriety and calmness in this time of great tension. We believe that, ultimately, that which is just and righteous will triumph. Let us not forget that in spite of the corrupt and violent manipulations of the demagogues in our society, we have proven our capacity to be united in a just cause and our willingness to offer fame, fortune and life when these were needed. In many critical situations in the past election, many expressed the greatness of the Filipino spirit which characterized the lives of our national heroes. Let us kindle the hearts of the people. ... Let us not despair especially at this time when the odds against that which is just and righteous are overwhelming. The

day will soon come, if we persist now, when "righteousness shall flow like a river and justice like a mighty stream."

We commend all who volunteered their services and fortune to protect the sanctity of the ballot. We honor those who suffered and those who died in defense of their rights and their honor. We owe an enduring debt of gratitude to them. It is the sacrifice of their lives which will purify the life of this nation. But to those who willingly offered themselves to be instruments of violence and corruption and those who willingly disobeyed the voice of their conscience and sold their honor and dignity for gold, may God have mercy on their souls. By these acts they have dishonored not only themselves but also their nation. May they find a way of rectifying their deeds. We pray that someday they, too, will experience the patriotic and heroic virtues which their countrymen and women, who now struggle for justice and righteousness, are experiencing. When that day comes, they will find their rightful place in a nation which is now discovering its soul.

In times like this, when fear is overwhelming, we must live according to our faith, remembering what the Lord said, "If my people humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." (II Chronicles 7:14)

(signed) Dr. Johnny V. Gumban
Chairperson
The Rev. La Verne D. Mercado
General Secretary

February 14, 1986



MESSAGE OF SOLIDARITY SENT TO THE PHILIPPINES

As tension mounted in the Philippines after ex-Defense Minister Enrile and General Ramos broke with Pres. Marcos, Christians in Japan watched the situation with increasing concern.

The following message was sent Feb. 25:

"We are observing the situation in the Philippines with deep concern and interest. We are particularly impressed with the fact that Filipino people stood up and expressed their will to support leaders who will reflect the aspirations of the Filipino people for justice and freedom. In the midst of prevailing difficulties we pray that the rights and life of the people be respected and that the churches in the Philippines will stand firm as a witness of the truth. We also appeal that all political prisoners be immediately released and that justice and democracy will be restored."

(Signed) Rev. MAEJIMA Munetoshi
General Secretary, NCC-J

ASIAN WOMEN'S SHELTER TO OPEN

Plans are underway for the opening ceremony of HELP (House in Emergency of Love and Peace), a shelter for Asian Women, to be held on March 17, 1986. The shelter is the special project of the Women's Christian Temperance Union in Japan as the 3000 WCTU members celebrate the 100th year anniversary of the group this year.

Land was purchased by the WCTU in 1894 for the purpose of building a home for Japanese women who had worked as prostitutes in other Asian countries. During the first 70 years of its history, the WCTU worked to establish the Prostitution Prevention Law in Japan. In order to persuade the government to establish the law, the WCTU offered to provide a place for those Japanese women when they returned to Japan. The building that presently stands on this site in Tokyo's Shinjuku Ward is in the last stages of re-modelling. Staff and case workers began their work as of the beginning of February 1986.

JAPAN-PHILIPPINE SOLIDARITY ACTION

When the December 15 meeting organized by the Japan Committee on Philippine Concerns (JCPC) ended, the 55 participants representing 34 Japanese groups concerned with Philippine issues had reached 3 main conclusions:

1. The first was to keep close watch on Japanese participation in growing militarization in Asia and the Pacific. Participants noted with concern the move for Japan to maintain sea-lane defense up to 1000 nautical miles from Japan, and the increasing integration of Japanese defense policy with American military strategy in the Asia-Pacific region. Aware that the Philippines is a cornerstone of American military policy in the region, participants noted that deeper involvement of Japan in American military policy brings with it the possibility that Japan will play the role of American policeman in the Philippines or elsewhere. Thus participants affirmed that joint efforts should be undertaken to carefully monitor and document Japanese military involvement in the Asia/Pacific region.

2. The second conclusion dealt with the issue of Japanese economic aid to the Philippines. Participants agreed that much of Japanese ODA (Official Development Assistance) serves to legitimize the regime of the Marcos dictatorship and support militarization in that country. Aid from the people of Japan should be directed so that it might benefit the people of the Philippines rather than provide political and economic support for a repressive government, it was stated. In efforts to achieve this goal, participants agreed to cooperate with politicians and economists who could provide valuable assistance in opposing present policy and in formulating an alternative one.

3. The third conclusion of the December 1985 gathering concerned the most immediate issue--the situation in Negros. Participants decided to launch a joint "Negros Campaign" throughout Japan. The serious and deteriorating situation in Negros is well-known by some Japanese

but they are the minority. Through the international and Japanese media, the Japanese public is well aware of hunger and starvation in Africa, but the reality of Asia is not part of the consciousness of most Japanese. The first steps of the Negros Campaign were undertaken in early February with the sending of a team to Negros. The four members of the team would gather up-to-date information including pictures, film, etc. to use in the educational campaign that would begin the Negros Campaign.

JAPAN-FORUM FOR PHILIPPINE CONCERNS

On February 5, 1986, twenty five people, including eight Diet Members representing 5 political parties, and concerned people from women's, religious, labour, legal and other groups gathered for the first ad hoc meeting of the Japan Forum for Philippine Concerns. Rev. MAEJIMA Munetoshi, General Secretary of the NCCJ, and Sister HIROTA Shizue of the Catholic Commission on Justice and Peace were two of those representing the ecumenical Japan Coalition on Philippine Concerns.

Those gathered elected an executive committee and confirmed their intention to establish a coordinating office in the near future. As well, the following telegram was sent both to President Ferdinand Marcos and to Mrs. Corazon Aquino:

"Conscious of the past history in which we victimized our Filipino brothers and sisters, we express our deep concern over the present situation in the Philippines. We fervently hope that the Presidential Elections on February 7 will be held fairly and justly according to the principles of democracy.

We express our great interest in observing how the elections will be conducted and how the counting will be done.

We strongly support in solidarity the Filipino people's aspirations for freedom, self-determination, democracy and human rights. We are reiterating our commitment to the immediate realization of the people's aspirations through our own efforts. In so doing, solidarity and friendship between the Filipino and Japanese peoples will be strengthened."

CONSULTATION ON NEW TECHNOLOGY,
WORK, AND THE ENVIRONMENT
HELD IN MANILA

Diliman Campus, University of the Philippines, Manila, was the site of the Consultation on New Technology, Work and the Environment, sponsored jointly by the WCC (World Council of Churches) Sub-Unit on Church and Society, and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), January 10-15, 1986. 15 participants from around Asia, including three persons from Japan, joined an equal number of Filipino participants in the wide-ranging discussions. Scientists, academics, activists from labour, anti-nuclear and other cause-oriented groups gathered with church people to consider the impact of science and technology on the well-being and survival of the people of Asia.

Jaime Cardinal Sin, Archbishop of Manila, in the opening session, spoke of the need to work for a conscious shaping of a better future. "A society that sees wealth in things and not in people is doomed," he declared. "The reality today is the degradation of men and women by the work process-- the deformation of creative workers into dehumanized beings at the mercy of the work process," said the Cardinal. It is time to ask fundamental question about the type of society we want, he urged. "It is time to work towards a society that meets the ethical norms of love and security for all."

The eloquent plea of south Korean theologian Dr. KIM Yong Bock to listen to those who have been victimized by technology and to create a "network of victims" set the tone for much of the discussion that followed. "The victims of power and technology hold privileged knowledge not understood by the experts, the scientists, the academics," Dr. Kim maintained. "They hold an 'epistemological advantage'. The victims have a special knowledge and experience of history--real history--of which those who control are completely unaware." He continued by saying that the Biblical message should be understood as the account of what God is doing in the world through its victims. "The reality is that the Bible is not an account of the

of the experience of the privileged in society but that of its victims." Dr. Kim's theological reflection on the theme ended with a strong call for those who hear the Biblical message to be just and proper stewards of God's creation. God has created the garden of peace and shalom in the midst of the surrounding chaos and we have been called to 'dress it and to keep it' (Gen. 2:15) Dr. Kim said.

It was against this theological backdrop that the consultation unfolded. Participants saw the experience of victims through presentations on the effect of agricultural insecticides and herbicides on the health of rural dwellers and consumers in Japan, on the environmental effects of marine pollution in Thailand and large-scale deforestation in the Philippines, and on the side effect of food additives, particularly MSG (Monosodium glutamate, or "Aji-no-moto") used widely in Asia. Participants heard in graphic terms how nuclear testing has devastated the health and habitat of the Pacific Islanders, and how nuclear power in the Philippines threatens to do the very same.

Consultation participants affirmed at the start of their deliberations that science and technology should be a kind of flower or tree in the Garden of justice and shalom, and not part of the jungle. Thus participants confirmed that the mission of the Church, based on its responsibility to preserve the integrity of creation, must also include efforts to direct science and technology in ways that enhance the well-being and survival of all. The Church must rediscover in its theological understanding and dialogue the perspectives and needs of the of those who suffer. It must take up its responsibility to identify itself with those who are the victims of technology's negative aspects, working with and supporting them. Three action areas were identified: 1) Educational efforts to make known ways in which technology dominates and oppresses people; 2) Efforts to make resources available to those who need them; 3) Establishment of solidarity networks among people of Asia and the Pacific. In the task of redirecting social and technological change, participants affirmed, the Church must not be a silent onlooker. (PKT)

NATIONAL FOUNDATION DAY MARKED

Again this year on February 11, ceremonies were held in Tokyo and other parts of Japan, many government-supported, marking "Kigensetsu" or National Foundation Day. On the same day, over 100 protest meetings were held. One of the largest protest gatherings was held at the Kyodan Yamate Church, with 600 people in attendance.

National Foundation Day was established as a national holiday in 1966 but the observance of February 11 as such continues to be a matter of controversy. Up until 1946, February 11 was celebrated to mark the accession of Japan's legendary first emperor, Jinmu, to the throne. Christians and other concerned citizens see the observance of February 11, or "Kigensetsu" as promoting the kind of aggressive nationalism that exploited the Emperor system for colonial and imperialist expansion in Asia before and during World War II.

Last year, Prime Minister Nakasone became the first prime minister to attend the February 11 ceremony, thus giving further legitimacy to the attempt to restore "National Foundation Day" to its former status of "Kigensetsu." That action led the NCC-J last year to issue a statement to its member churches and organizations. The following is an excerpt from that statement:

"We would like to remind our membership that before the end of World War II February 11 was called "Kigensetsu." It was a symbolic day used to provide a sacred root for Japan's militarism and for the promotion of militaristic fervour. ...Prime Minister Nakasone accepted the invitation to attend the [1985] ceremony on the grounds that it would be free of religious elements, but this is simply cooperation in the political manipulation of the old Kigensetsu, the mythology of the Tenno [Emperor] System ..."

This year, of great concern to Christians and others was the attendance of 51 diplomats from 45 countries to the Tokyo ceremony at the National Theatre. For the first time, the American

Ambassador, Mike Mansfield, attended the ceremony. Ambassador Mansfield's attendance may have given the go-ahead signal to others who had been contacted by the NCC-J and asked not to attend. During the nationally televised ceremony, Ambassador Mansfield sat on stage, in the place of honour beside Prime Minister Nakasone.

Telegrams of support for Christian opposition to National Foundation Day and protest against Ambassador Mansfield's attendance at the Tokyo ceremony came from both the NCCCUSA (National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA) and the United Methodist Church. Messages sent to Ambassador Mansfield are quoted below (both were received Feb.10):

"NCCCUSA, consisting of 31 communions with some 40 million members, is deeply concerned [re] plan to attend and make speech at Feb. 11 National Foundation Ceremony. ...We believe that both in its mythical-historical interpretation and in attempts to re-institute National Foundation Day, adherents have used it to promote Shintoism and as a means of eroding constitutional government which recognizes freedom of religion and the separation of church and state. ...We believe it is inappropriate for our ambassador to engage in an activity which is opposed by religious groups, political parties, and citizens' movements. ...We urge you to ... seek an opportunity to join in the celebration of May 3, Constitution Day, a gesture which would be deeply appreciated by Japanese citizens who defend and nurture constitutional freedoms ..."

(signed) NCCCUSA

"We are deeply disturbed [re] your intention to attend and speak at National Foundation Day event Feb. 11. As you know, this day has been a rallying point for Japanese elements seen by Christian friends in Japan and neighbouring Asian countries to be sympathetic to ultra-nationalism, renewed militarism and erosion of division between state and religion. We sincerely urge you to refrain from participation and continue to be a supporter of constitutional democracy in Japan..."

(signed) United Methodist Church

NCC-J NEWSBRIEFS

AHI ANNIVERSARY

In a service of celebration and thanksgiving on December 21, 1985, medical, governmental and religious leaders, AHI (Asian Rural Health Institute) participants, board members, volunteers and staff joined to mark the fifth anniversary of the founding of AHI.

In the past five years, AHI has developed a network of colleagues and counterpart relations throughout Asia, assisted 292 health workers in special training, built a new training centre, and has received official approval and recognition from the Japanese government.

Those involved in the anniversary service reminisced by saying that when AHI was first begun, Asia was conceived as a single unit. However, "we have come to realize that actually Asia is a constantly moving mixture of many peoples. It is largely agriculture-based, with scattered industrial centres. Extremes in wealth and circumstances exist side by side. Such realities are causing crucial health problems for Asian people. The AHI training program is gearing to helping local people to solve some of these health problems."

"AHI seeks to serve Asian people as a helping neighbour in the true sense of the word. In obedience to Christ's message, we are trying to reach out in love to those who most need help. The cornerstone of AHI has these words:

'As you did it to one of the least of these, my brethren, you did it unto me.' (Matt. 25:40)"

IWAKUNI SHALOM CENTRE

Revs. Blanca and Doug Mikell, co-directors of the Iwakuni Shalom Centre write in the December issue of "Shalom News" (formerly the "Serendipity Quarterly"):

"... The aim of the Centre in the past has been to be a sort of place where people of varied backgrounds and beliefs could come together to share and talk of their experiences openly and without fear of reprisal. The Centre continues to be an open centre for dialogue,

taking a much more critical position on the problems of militarization and its consequences.

...But there are still other needs and it is the aim of the Centre to respond openly to these, too. It is our hope that we can move into becoming a centre that is closely identified with the struggles of the community in which it is located.

Our situation is unique in that our location is in a city and community dominated by the presence of a joint U.S.-Japan military. ...If you have visited the Centre, you know that we are surrounded by snack bars, cabarets, drinking pubs, Indian tailor shops, a few small green grocers and related shops. Everywhere there is the domineering presence of the base. Our ministry is to the men, women and children who live here. Our ministry is to the women who are brought to this area from other Asian countries for the sole purpose of being used to serve as sexual entertainment for the Marines who frequent the bars.

...Our goal is thus to be at the centre of the community, that is, to discover what it means to be human in a broken world. We can achieve this goal only by first understanding our place in this community, and by experiencing the lives of the people we have been called to serve. Only then will it be possible to be agents of liberation and advocates of human rights."

NCCJ PEACE COMMITTEE

The NCCJ Peace Committee was formed in 1979. Part of their work together has been theological study on peace and the biblical concept of "shalom." Some of the material that has come out of the work of the Committee has been carried in previous issues of JCAN (Peace Appeal in issues #620 and 621, peace liturgy in issue #626.)

In March 1985, 25 men and 25 women came together at the Maruki Peace Museum in Saitama Prefecture for a 3-day "Peace Activists Seminar" sponsored by the NCCJ. Out of that gathering, 22 people have come to form the core of the re-vitalized Peace Committee. The ecumenical group, which includes Catholics, has since December 1985, been (cont'd next page)

(NCCJ Peace Committee cont'd)

meeting monthly to plan peace-making actions to undertake this year. Plans include: 1) Building a network of people struggling with the problems caused by the 29 US and Japanese military bases in Japan; 2) Promotion of peace education materials and educational programmes among Japanese churches; 3) Increase in theological understanding of peace through actual participation in peace-making; 4) Exchange of information and people with other countries and exposure trips for peace activists.

NCCJ WOMEN'S COMMITTEE SPONSORS MEETING

Under the theme, "Women living in Asia," 28 women from 10 different church backgrounds met in Hino, Tokyo, February 10 to 11.

The focus of the 2-day discussion was various issues relating to Korean women in Japan, who face serious problems in their daily lives. They are discriminated against in every level of social structure in Japan. Participants jointly affirmed the following statement:

"Korean women in Japan face multiple forms of discrimination. The Church and other women in Japan are on the side of the oppressors unless we join in solidarity with women who are struggling at the bottom of society. At the same time, we realize that women in Japan themselves are not yet free from oppression in their own lives. An oppressive social structure is not only the reality in Japan. The present situation in Japan is deeply linked to the total picture of Asia. We realize that growing militarization in Asia reinforces the oppressive social structure.

In this situation, we must choose life rather than death. Together we affirm our commitment to step forward in solidarity with other Asian women, in common struggle for a just and free world for all."

The women made the statement on Feb. 11, the so-called "National Foundation Day," as a conscious action of Japanese women united to free themselves from the oppressive Emperor System and join with their Asian sisters in the struggle for freedom and justice.

PHILIP POTTER AWARDED NIWANO PEACE PRIZE

The Niwano Peace Foundation, funded by Rissho Kosei-Kai, a lay Buddhist organization in Japan, has awarded the 1986 Niwano Peace Prize to Philip Potter, former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches.

Each year the Foundation awards the prize of ¥20 million to an individual or organization who has made "a significant contribution to world peace through promoting inter-religious co-operation." This year, the Foundation solicited nominations from 862 individuals and organizations in 121 countries. A committee of 6, which included Buddhist, Muslim and Christian representatives, choose Dr. Potter from among these nominations.

Dr. Potter will come to Japan to receive the award in a ceremony scheduled for April 22, arriving April 20.

HUNGER STRIKE TO DEMAND CHANGE IN ARL

Representatives from over 50 Protestant and Catholic groups held a hunger strike from Feb. 17 - 21 in front of Yamate Church, Shibuya, Feb. 21 - 24 at Tokyo Cathedral, Mejiro as part of their struggle in the Alien Registration Law.

Catholic Priest E. de Guchtenerre, a Belgian priest who has served 30 years in Sendai, refused to give his finger print on his alien registration card in Oct. 1984. He faces deportation after Feb. 24, 1986 unless he changes his mind and gives his finger print. The hunger strike was launched to protest this decision of the Justice Ministry. The total of 60 people will be involved in actual hunger strike.

On Feb. 10 twenty-four pastors and University professors handed in their protest statement regarding the ARL to the Ministry of Justice. Kunihiro Sato (NCC Moderator) and Munetoshi Maejima (NCC General Secretary) were among them.

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